STREET SPIRIT

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JUSTICE NEWS & HOMELESS BLUES IN THE BAY AREA

Faith Leaders Denounce Berkeley Homeless Laws

by Terry Messman

The voices of Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist and Unitarian faith leaders rang out in defense of the rights of homeless people at an interfaith rally held on April 9 to denounce the City Council's sweeping array of anti-homeless measures.

Clergy and leaders of churches, synagogues and temples delivered an electrifying outcry for compassion and justice for people living on the streets who are targeted by the City Council and the Downtown Berkeley Association (DBA).

The religious leaders gathered on the same downtown streets where homeless people are being criminalized, harassed by police, and even beaten by DBA ambassadors, and called for an end to the cruel repression faced by the poorest of the poor.

A Franciscan friar confronts Berkeley's anti-homeless laws. Brown-robed Franciscan Louie Vitale speaks out for the rights of the poor. Alex Madonik photo

The Spirit of St. Francis

In a dramatic moment, Louie Vitale, a Franciscan friar who is widely respected as one of the giants in the movement for peace and justice, stepped up to the microphone in his brown Franciscan robes and called the community to conscience.

"Nobody should be criminalized for the necessities of life," said Vitale. "And these are necessities of life — to be able to lie down, to get some sleep, to relieve yourself, to find some food. These are necessities of life!"

As the elderly Franciscan friar spoke out, it was as if St. Francis of Assisi himself had stepped forward to demand compassion for the poor and oppressed.

"I have been working with homeless people for the last several decades in San Francisco," Vitale said, "and now I find it in the East Bay where I live. It's just a tragedy to see. I've seen people die on the streets. And the number of people dying on the streets rises every year. Those of us who are comfortable have to speak out. What we do for others is what counts. We have to realize these are our sisters and brothers who deserve and need our help."

Until shortly before his retirement, Vitale had been the spiritual leader of all the Franciscans in the Western United States in his role as Provincial Minister of the Western Province of Franciscans. He also has overwhelming respect in peace-and-justice circles due to his decades of nonviolent witness against war. In recent years, Vitale has served several six-month sentences in federal prison for acts of civil disobedience in protest of war, nuclear weapons, drone attacks and torture.

He also worked tirelessly for homeless people in San Francisco through his work at St. Anthony's Foundation, which serves thousands of daily meals to poor and hungry people. For most priests, that would have been enough. But Vitale went beyond even that commitment.

When he would find homeless people shivering on Tenderloin streets in the early morning hours before service programs were open, he often opened up the doors of his church and invited them into St. Boniface so they could find a refuge from the harsh weather. It wasn't permissible to do so, but Vitale ignored all the regulations in his belief that offering poor people a sanctuary was the very essence of what a church should be.

When San Francisco launched the *Matrix program to criminalize homeless* people, Father Vitale joined Sister Bernie Galvin and Religious Witness with Homeless People in committing civil disobedience over and over again in protest of the same kind of anti-homeless laws recently adopted in Berkeley.

See **Faith Leaders Cry Out** *page 6*

Frances Beal: A Voice for Peace, Racial Justice and the Rights of Women

by Maureen Hartmann

I first met Frances M. Beal in a poetry group in our senior residence in Oakland. Later, beginning in August 2011, I came to know her for three years as a somewhat feisty fellow resident council member. Our board meetings involved some personal sharing and I got to know in the meetings that she had a doctorate in African-American women's studies from the Sorbonne.

I am concerned about race relations in Oakland, and I have personal friendships that matter to me. In the 1960s, as a young woman studying existential philosophy, I was concerned about civil rights in the southern states.

I participated in the Oakland Stand Up for Peace on Saturday, March 14, 2015, held by S.A.V.E. (Soldiers Against Violence Everywhere) in which African-Americans and whites commemorated and prayed for those slain by gun violence in Oakland, and for those they left behind.

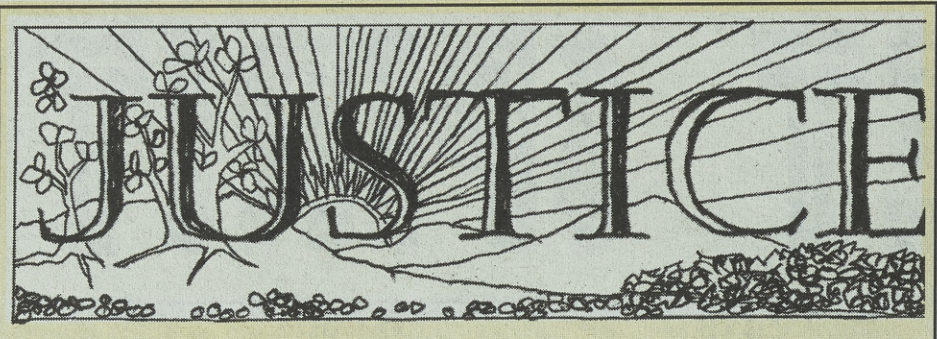
A black mother participant expressed grief for the loss of her murdered son. As an Episcopal woman, who converted from Catholicism partly because they allow women to be priests, and as someone concerned about women's rights, I do have some understanding of the grief of a mother who has to bury a son lost to senseless violence.

I was at Frances Beal's 75th birthday party this year, and became inspired to write about her activism, after photographs of her life were screened. The best writing venue of which I could think was *Street Spirit,* for which I had written before.

It is a privilege and an honor to be able to write about a woman of such courage and wit. Frances M. Beal is the daughter of an African-American father and a Jewish mother, born in Binghamton, New York, on Jan. 13, 1940. She developed a political conscience early in life, in part because of society's anti-Semitism and racism, and spent her life as an activist, organizing and writing in the movements for civil rights, racial justice, peace and women's rights.

See **Frances Beal: A Powerful Voice** *page 10*

The mural on the Women's Building in San Francisco features images of iconic women in history. Frances M. Beal is one of the women named and honored as part of this mural. The mural was painted by Juana Alicia, Miranda Bergman, Edythe Boone, Susan Kelk Cervantes, Meera Desai, Yvonne Littleton, Irene Perez, and many helpers. Photo credit: Plateaueatplau



DBA Paints a Happy Face Over a Brutal Beatdown

The Downtown Berkeley Association tries to look respectable while pouring their out-of-town real estate money into robbing the poor of their blankets.

Protesters rally to condemn the anti-homeless laws in Berkeley. Sarah Menefee photo

Defending civil rights is really fun. There's nothing quite like the roaring company of people who know the street, lawyers who love the people who know the street, artists whose work seems to blossom under the press of repression, and all of us who get to embrace honesty and conscience as a matter of course in life. Come to the party!

Two Downtown Berkeley Association ambassadors confronted a homeless man and began beating him. Bryan Hamilton's video of this brutal assault has gone viral.

A Column on Human Rights

by Carol Denney

You know you're in exotic territory when you're at a meeting in Berkeley and someone looks up, announces an opportunity for public comment — *and nobody wants to say a word.*

The annual meeting of the Downtown Berkeley Association (DBA) on April 14 featured talks by pumped-up staff hoping nobody would make an issue of the international black eye given the whole town by the viral video that exposed the harassment, assault and false arrest of two homeless men at the hands of the DBA's Block by Block "ambassador" program.

They didn't have to worry. If you subtracted DBA board members and staff and the requisite city functionaries and catering crew, the place was pretty much empty except for a handful of curious observers enjoying the refreshments. Both city officials and the DBA are skilled at feigning surprise when international and local backlash against the repressive anti-homeless laws they trot out like clockwork every few years guts Berkeley merchants' chances at a normal year.

They're also skilled at feigning that they are *representative*.

The Downtown Berkeley Association's job is supposed to boost the city's desirability as a place to be and to see, a place to do business. It poses as representing "downtown" or "downtown businesses," but at this point it's made up of a handful of large property interests collapsing inward, trading appointed board positions between them like casseroles at a potluck, and relying on poorly disguised fake grassroots (i.e. BARF, Anchor Tenancy arts groups) to imitate support. *In other words, it's a lot like the City Council.*

John Caner, the DBA's CEO, tried to seem upbeat as he mentioned the $60,000 they'd spent in 2014 on sparkly holiday lights, the effect of which was pretty much ruined by all the CS gas unleashed on December's Black Lives Matters protesters now suing the city, adding "hopefully that is now behind us."

Caner did mention the viral video of the beatdown by DBA ambassadors, which he called "an opportunity for us to learn."

Lance Goree, who oversees the Block by Block ambassador program, said of the videotaped violence against two homeless people: "The mistake I made in hiring him (the one ambassador who was fired) will not happen again." Kind of an easy assurance to make since rehiring someone you've fired and who may be charged with criminal assault would make you look pretty dumb.

Oh well, these aren't rocket scientists. I kind of felt sorry for the Berkeley City Councilmembers who were there: Lori Droste, Susan Wengraf, Darryl Moore, Laurie Capitelli, and of course Mayor Tom Bates, who tried to reassure these bumblers that they have their back since most of Berkeley sleeps through the systematic harassment and criminalization of the poor and nobody's paying attention to that stuff.

But they may want to rethink the fact that over $100,000 each from the City of Berkeley and the University of California is going straight into the pockets of these ineffectual knuckleheads and their ridiculous hanging flower pots, since the housing, mental health, and educational programs that are currently being starved are a big part of what would make a practical difference to one's downtown experience.

That $200,000 and the million-plus that make up the DBA's budget still looks like real money to some of us.

Flower pots or housing and shelter space — *your choice, Berkeley*. The DBA ambassadors serve as a foil for the police, the DBA serves as a foil for the City Council, and what got lost along the way was an honestly representative voice for any community, since the large property owners, well, let's just say they travel a lot.

Caner cited his DBA poll's landslide public concern that they should do something about homelessness. The numbers on any other issue were miniscule compared to the obvious idiocy of trying to have a vibrant town center with people trying to brush their teeth, organize their belongings, and find their way out of the nightmare created by a housing crisis *for which the DBA's own property owners and landlords are largely responsible*.

If there were honest market forces in the mix, the empty retail spaces downtown that have been yawning vacantly for years, would long ago have lowered their rates and be bustling with new businesses and jobs. Notice how that just doesn't happen the way your civics teacher said it would?

Caner tried to look happy about the 16 new businesses opening downtown, knowing that anybody can go to the City of Berkeley's website and contrast the number 16 with the more than 70 empty retail spaces which large property owners have no particular interest in filling up — unless they can get pre-2008 rates. And that's not mentioning the hundreds of empty office spaces — don't even go there.

The City of Berkeley and the Downtown Berkeley Association — which are pretty much one and the same — could, of course, prioritize shelter and low-income housing to meet community needs, creating more housing and protecting what's left.

But that would interfere with the juggernaut of out-of-town real estate interests who prefer to knock down the old single-room-occupancy and cheap housing and kick out the artists, hippies and musicians who whine about civil rights and democracy.

And who can gather signatures for a referendum on the City Council's new anti-homeless laws when the City Manager gets done fluffing them? It's not that hard, since so few people vote, and one only needs a set percentage of the voting public to rescind a law. Which the council will then put on the ballot, followed by the comedy of the City and the DBA trying to look respectable while pouring their out-of-town real estate money into robbing the poor of their blankets.

Mayor Tom Bates also spoke at the DBA annual meeting, and seems to have perfected inaudibility. Not only could nobody hear him, nobody asked him to get closer to the mike or turn up the sound. I suppose they were happy enough to see that his lips were still moving.

The mayor had two unexciting things to announce for the DBA's future: a BART Plaza redesign for what must be the fifth or sixth time, and changing Shattuck Avenue to two-way traffic — keeping the bar low in a year when the assessments for mandated membership are going up 2.5 percent and the property-based improvement district has to be reaffirmed by its membership right after the international embarrassment of that ambassador beatdown.

They haven't fired the second DBA ambassador, by the way, the one who stopped people from helping the fellow being beaten and who was, in fact, supervising the green-shirted pugilist. The program and its staff were saluted without embarrassment at the DBA annual meeting despite the Peace and Justice Commission's recommendation that the program be disbanded.

You can't make this stuff up. It's going to be a blast. It's the same thing a lot of us have done before, but come out and join us because defending civil rights is really, really fun. Our songs are better. Our food is better, especially considering the DBA's raggedy menu the other night.

There's nothing quite like the roaring company of people who know the street, lawyers who love the people who know the street, ACLU types who love to sing the old civil rights songs, artists whose work seems to blossom under the press of repression, and all of us who get to embrace honesty and conscience as a matter of course in life. Come to the party! I want to meet you.

Booted Out

by Claire J. Baker

What you see is all
we got. Booted out of
a "jungle" by a creek
into an overgrown lot,
church steps at night,
a mall in stall;

photographed as objects
of pity wherever we dare
settle in town or city.

We die of hypothermia,
hunger, and we're sick.
So, public, take your pick.

Right To Rest Legislation Held Over in State Senate

Supporters of the Right to Rest outnumbered opposition lobbyists from business alliances and city governments 6 to 1 during hearings in Sacramento.

by TJ Johnston

The Right to Rest Act, California Senate Bill 608, which would decriminalize sleep, rest, the sharing of food and prayer, was pulled from committee without a vote. But the struggle for the bill in California will continue next year.

For now, SB 608 has been delayed after State Sen. Carol Liu (D-La Cañada-Flintridge) asked the Transportation and Housing Committee to hold off a vote on April 7 when it appeared there weren't enough votes to advance the legislation.

"Today wasn't a defeat," said Paul Boden, director of the Western Regional Advocacy Project, one of the homeless advocacy organizations sponsoring the bill. "It was step one in a long process."

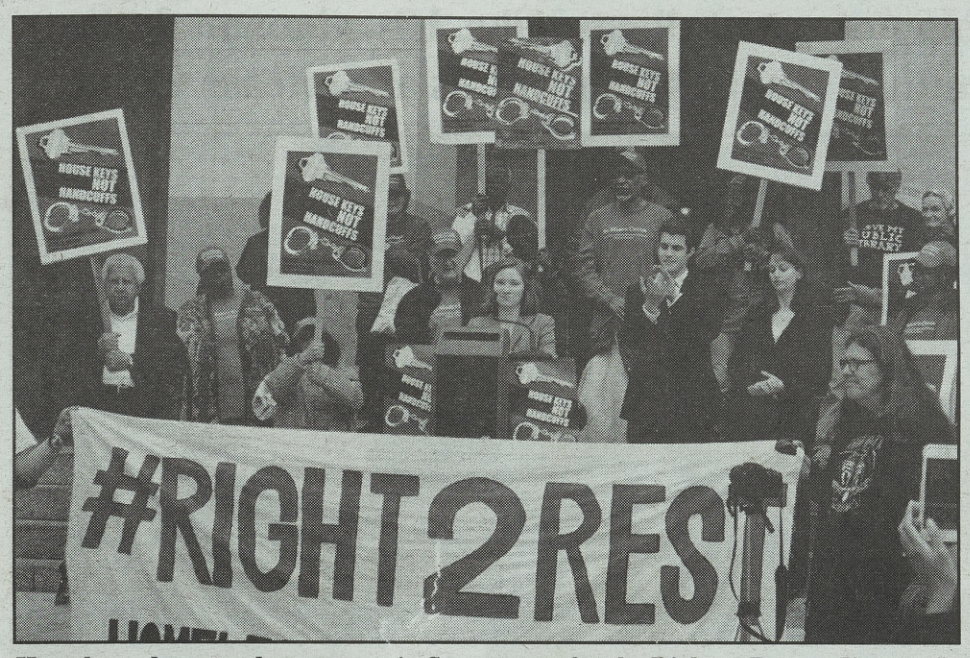
SB 608, known as the Right to Rest Act, will still be active next year, he said. The state legislature still has up to two years to act on proposed legislation.

If passed by both the Senate and Assembly, the bill would ensure all Californians — regardless of housing status — the rights to rest, move freely in public, share food, pray, and sleep in a legally parked vehicle.

In effect, it would make local sit-lie and anti-panhandling ordinances that cities use against their homeless residents unenforceable throughout the state.

At the hearing, proponents of the bill — including a busload of advocates of homeless people from San Francisco and Oakland — turned out in great numbers. Supporters outnumbered opposition lobbyists from business alliances and city governments 6 to 1 during public comment.

Their refrain throughout the session was "stop criminalizing homelessness." Several wore T-shirts with the words "Homeless Bill of Rights" and an image of a dove and a pair of hands breaking chains. This popular design comes from an image drawn by Ronnie Goodman, a homeless artist who has regularly lent his work to homeless people's struggles.



Homeless advocates demonstrate in Sacramento for the Right to Rest Bill which would end the enforcement of many anti-homeless laws. Photo credit: Janny Castillo

Angel McClain, whom Liu invited before the panel, spoke in defense of SB 608. Now a senior advocate at St. Mary's Center in Oakland, she spent 15 years on the streets, staying in tents, abandoned houses and by freeways — essentially, any place where she could find refuge.

She said that police officers targeted her for arrest simply because of her homeless status. "I was arrested for little or no reason because I was known as a homeless person," she told the panel. "My cousin told me the police had a schedule to pick me up and put me back in jail."

McClain also suffered dehumanizing treatment from the police. "I was treated like dirt, no consideration, like a piece of garbage that you discard," she said.

Opposition to the Right to Rest bill came mainly from the League of California Cities, which argued that the bill would exempt homeless people from so-called "quality of life" laws that in theory apply to all people, but in fact are used almost exclusively against homeless people. The statewide association wrote a letter to Liu that the bill wouldn't create or expand housing and social services.

But Boden said that is not the focus of the bill. It's meant to remove legal barriers homeless people face because they have been arrested for the necessary acts of resting, sitting or lying in public.

"It's not about ending homelessness, just decriminalizing it," he said. "Everyone sleeps, eats and sits, but only some get tickets or go to jail for it. Criminalization only makes things worse for people living on the streets. And by not having to enforce crimes of status, law enforcement can focus on real public safety issues."

However, senators on the committee and opponents of the bill said SB 608 would remove a tool from police in enforcing local ordinances (see sidebar).

Appearing before the panel, Matt Gray, a lobbyist for Taxpayers for Improving Public Safety and the California Small Business Association, painted a worst-case scenario of what would happen to communities if the bill passes.

"The answer is simply not to allow the rest of California to be like San Francisco," he said.

Recently, the city of San Francisco was also used as a model of homeless criminalization in a report from the University of California at Berkeley law school. Of the 58 cities with anti-homeless ordinances it studied, San Francisco tied Los Angeles to lead all others in their overwhelming number of anti-homeless laws — 23 in San Francisco. Homeless people were given about 23,000 citations in a seven-year span for such nonviolent, poverty-related offenses as sitting, resting, camping and panhandling.

In the last five years, San Francisco further restricted homeless people's activities with prohibitions on sitting and lying on sidewalks at certain times, staying in public parks overnight, and parking large vehicles on most city streets overnight.

Berkeley — which has 10 anti-homeless ordinances of its own — is considering adding many more, including setting one's belonging by a tree, lying on planter walls, and panhandling within 10 feet of parking pay station.

On March 17, the City Council forwarded these recommendations to the City Manager for recommendation.

Osha Neumann, an attorney with the East Bay Community Law Center, said the proposal would make Berkeley's tree-lined and metered streets off limits to homeless people if it is enacted.

"Taken together with existing laws, these ordinances would essentially make it illegal for people who are homeless to have a presence on our streets and sidewalks," he said.

Right to Rest bills are moving through legislatures in Oregon and Colorado.

Two years ago, a more expansive version of the legislation called the Homeless Bill of Rights passed the Assembly Judiciary Committee, but died when the Appropriations Committee declined to bring it up for a vote.

Mission Street Sleep

by George Wynn

Your City of St. Francis
black feet
brown feet
white feet
peek out
beneath blankets
along lowerMission
chain link fence and
pigeon droppings galore
across from Bank
of America door

You Can't Make This Stuff Up

Stupid Things California Lawmakers Say About Homelessness

by TJ Johnston

If there was any doubt that SB 608, the Right to Rest Act, would face any roadblocks in the legislative process, they were surely dispelled when State Sen. Cathleen Galgiani (D-Stockton) weighed in. Before Galgiani's remarks, a few of the California state senators on the Transportation and Housing committee had already voiced reservations that would lead to a prospective "No" if SB 608 author Carol Liu asked for a vote on the bill on April 7.

Some were concerned about provisions in the bill such as a $1,000 fine to communities upon violation of the act. Others wanted clarifications on how the bill would affect those sleeping on public versus private property. (Liu said it would not apply to private property.)

But Galgiani's rambling explanation of why she wouldn't support the bill left some incredulous. While asserting that uneven application of anti-homeless ordinances aren't a problem in her district, she said cops still need them for other reasons — such as thwarting gang warfare.

"You and I and law enforcement cannot tell who is homeless from someone who belongs to a gang," she said. "If I dress down, I can blend in as well."

She then recounted a recent incident that happened in her district.

"This last month," she said, "we've had a drive-by shooting at a market just blocks away from where I used to live a few years ago, where three people were killed. Now it's a known place where people loiter. How do you define 'loiter?' You can't define it just by looking at someone or seeing that someone is spending time at a place for too long. That's why we must rely on law enforcement for the judgments on behavior taking place. Law enforcement needs that tool to address the behavior."

What Galgiani failed to mention is that the U.S. Supreme Court found anti-loitering laws to be unconstitutional in 1999 primarily because of their vagueness.

Galgiani also related another recent tale of an altercation among three motorcycle gangs near a strip club where gunfire was exchanged.

"These are the problems in my district," she said. "Law enforcement in my district, they're not bothering people who are homeless. I respect that is occurring throughout the state." She added that the state should "do a broad blanket for everyone to abide by" if SB 608 becomes law.

Another addition for the file under "you can't make this up" came from Matt Gray, who lobbied against the bill on behalf of two business organizations.

While he encouraged creating affordable housing and improving social and health services — at the same time, referring to homeless people as "transients, homeless or whatever you want to call them" — he ultimately said the overarching solution wasn't "allowing the rest of California to be like San Francisco." No city in California has more anti-homeless laws than San Francisco.

Street Spirit

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Contact *Street Spirit* Vendor Coordinator

The *Street Spirit* vendor program is managed by J.C. Orton. More than 150 homeless vendors sell *Street Spirit* in Berkeley and Oakland. Please buy *Street Spirit* only from badged vendors.

If you have questions about the vendor program, please e-mail J.C. Orton at noscw@sbcglobal.net or call his cell phone at (510) 684-1892. His mailing address is J.C. Orton, P.O. Box 13468, Berkeley, CA 94712-4468.

A Desire to Do Good for His Community

Twinkle is beloved by volunteers and clients alike. His adamant desire to do good for his community inspires many of us at Suitcase Clinic.

University students involved with Suitcase Clinic create a sense of community by providing meals and many needed services.

by Caroline Pohl

The Suitcase Clinic runs three drop-in clinics in Berkeley each week: Youth Clinic, Women's Clinic and General Clinic. In all three of our clinics, we welcome our clients with open arms.

Despite only weekly services and lack of permanent facilities, Suitcase Clinic aims to create a community for its clientele while also providing them with immediate healthcare and relief. Suitcase Clinic, as an organization, parallels the temporary and ever-changing climate of homelessness — empowering its volunteers with the ability to adapt to meet the different needs of our clients.

At General Clinic, we strive to cater to the entirety of Berkeley's homeless community: the young and the old, women and men, newcomers and regulars. Our volunteers take extra measures to provide people with personalized services, such as soothing clients during footwashing and massage, listening closely to their requests in haircuts, and following through with their dilemmas from the previous week. This makes the experience, both for the clients and volunteers, different with each visit.

So this week, on behalf of General Clinic, I would like to introduce you to one of our clients, known to many of us as Twinklebell, and to others simply as Twinkle. Here is a man beloved by both volunteers and clients alike, and whose adamant desire to do good for his own community inspires many of us at Suitcase Clinic.

A Berkeley native, Twinkle came from a large middle-class family, with 70 first cousins. He grew up in a past era transformed by the great civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and his family members were active participants in this new wave of radicalism. As a Mexican-American himself, Twinkle spent his childhood struggling in concord with these groups in order to gain a sense of his own community identity.

Twinkle is both an activist and leader within the homeless population. "It is my choice to live a nomadic lifestyle," he said, "and to find out what freedoms we really do have."

Twinkle possesses a high school degree, as well as two years of a community college education. He has a background in legal studies, and works independently, choosing his battles on the streets in the context of larger political endeavors.

Just the other day, Twinkle challenged police officers who were wrongly interpreting Oakland's Sit-Lie Ordinance by enforcing the law at an incorrect time interval.

"I simply bring these kinds of cases to court," Twinkle said. "Whether or not a lawyer or organization wants to choose to carry through with them to a higher level, well, that's their choice."

According to Twinkle, many people are driven to homelessness by the impractical ideals of happiness forged by the media. "When you think about it, our country is one of the richest in the world," said Twinkle. "For as long as I have lived, the economy has been pretty darn great, too. So, then why are a large number of people still unhappy and why are things still the way they are?"

Currently, Twinkle is working at a grassroots level to change this, and is an active participant in Indybay.org and Farmer's Market campaigns. He also recently attended Suitcase Clinic's Homelessness and Poverty Symposium.

Yet, Twinkle's ultimate goal is to secure a sense of community in the Bay Area. He encourages others to dance with him as he attends Ecstatic Dance three to four times a week, and wants to bring back the ice-skating rink Berkeley once had a long time ago.

"I'm just trying to bring people together," said Twinkle. "I believe that we all have a right to happiness — in whatever way we all believe that to be."

STORIES FROM THE SUITCASE CLINIC

THE SUITCASE CLINIC SINCE 1989

Are You Cold, Mr. Caner

by Carol Denney

are you cold, Mr. Caner
is that why you want to make
having a blanket a crime?
are you cold, Mr. Caner
is that why you're targeting
people who don't have a dime?
are you cold, Mr. Caner
is that why you want to take
blankets away from the poor?
are you cold, Mr. Caner?
getting old, Mr. Caner?
is that what you're doing it for?

is it true, Mr. Caner
you want to make people
keep all of their things off the ground?
is it true, Mr. Caner
you want to pass laws
so that people can't sleep or lie down?
is it true, Mr. Caner
you want to stop people
from asking for help from a friend?
is it true, Mr. Caner
are you through, Mr. Caner
we're wondering where it will end?

blankets -- are you serious?
blankets are soft and they're warm
blankets -- it's mysterious
blankets can't do any harm

are you tired, Mr. Caner
did life get so hard that
you're taking it out on the town?
are you tired, Mr. Caner
so tired of it all that you
wish there were no one around?
your rich friends, Mr. Caner
have chased out the businesses
because the rents are so high
are you tired, Mr. Caner
you're fired, Mr. Caner
this is one town you can't buy

blankets -- are you serious?
blankets are soft and they're warm
blankets -- it's mysterious
blankets can't do any harm

are you sure, Mr. Caner
you're comfortable targeting
people with nowhere to go?
are you sure, Mr. Caner
you should target the poor when
the whole world is watching the show
it's absurd, Mr. Caner
when rich people want to take
blankets away from the poor
it's absurd, Mr. Caner
in a word, Mr. Caner
please see your way out the door
it's absurd, Mr. Caner
in a word, Mr. Caner
we don't need your help anymore

Ark of Loneliness

by Peter Marin

Filing in, one by one,
as if into an ark
of loneliness, out of the rain
the shelter, its gray
emptiness anchored
at the bottom by green cots
arranged in rows, boots
tucked under, men asleep,
rocked on the surface
of watery dreams by a
great storm never to end.

Ghosts in Atlanta

by Peter Marin

There are ghosts here
haunting the downtown streets
before sun-up, men the color
of night on their way
to the labor pools, seeking
the work whites won't do —
mend sewers, clean pools, cart
garbage, wash dishes, trek
to the dump what everyone
throws away: the detritus of
a culture haunted by waste,
burning at night in great pyres
unwanted things, unneeded lives.

Passports

by Rose Mary Boehm

He looks at my face
stamps my passport.
Yes Sir, I know I am a fraud.
Pardon me? Oh, of course.
I was born in dark times
in a place of horror.
No Sir, I didn't. I changed
my nationality for love.
Was he worth it?
I am not sure I follow, Sir.
Love for my children.
We couldn't go through
different doors. And then
I ask myself, now that you
brought it up: will any man
ever be worth the sacrifice?
I lived through dark times,
in places of horror. And often
wondered whether I would
become transparent.

A Classic For All Ages

by Mary Rudge

Seven-year-old Diana and I
cry over Gogol's *The Overcoat*
on channel 9 now
cold Russia old poor man
even without subtitles
his face we both know.
It was cold in our house last winter
we had coats from the thrift shop
at night we slept in one bed
we piled on all the coats.
The cold old man is going to die
we saw that face once in our mirror,
and cry.

Interfaith Vigil for the Rights of Homeless People

"We have thousands of people in our country that are refugees just living in our doorways." —Sally Hindman

by Lydia Gans

The Berkeley City Council is moving to enact ever more draconian laws targeting homeless people — in effect, criminalizing homelessness.

Panhandling within 10 feet of a parking pay station would be a crime. Putting personal objects in planters or within three feet of a tree well would be a crime. Poor people will have to have a tape measure handy to make sure they're not committing a crime.

As a matter of fact, just about anything that a homeless person needs for sleeping — tents, mats or sleeping bags — cannot be left on any sidewalk at any time of day. Nor can personal items be attached to trees, planters, parking meters, etc. And, oh yes, it would be a crime to sit against a building.

People who object to this inhumane treatment of homeless people are organizing to express their opposition. An interfaith coalition of Buddhists, Quakers, Roman Catholics, Unitarians, Christians, Muslims and Jews is speaking out against the criminalization of homelessness.

On April 9, they held a protest in solidarity with homeless people at the downtown Berkeley BART Plaza. Starting at 5:00 p.m. with a meal and an interfaith service, the vigil concluded with a sleep-out at the Plaza until 6:00 a.m. Friday morning.

By 5 p.m., a good number of people had gathered. Several rows of chairs had been set up, the speakers were set up, and a colorful banner made by young people at Youth Spirit Art Works declared: "Interfaith Solidarity with Homeless People." The Berkeley Unitarian Fellowship provided the sound system and chairs for people attending the service.

J.C. Orton of the Catholic Worker was there serving a hearty vegetable soup, and Virginia Hollins-Davidson of the Berkeley Unitarian Fellowship, with a nod to the Passover and Easter holiday tradition, served matzos and cups of grape juice.

Rayven Wilson and Carena Ridgeway, young leaders in the Youth Spirit Artworks program, introduced the speakers. There were more than 20 speakers, representing the many faith communities in the coalition. Their messages were inspiring, calling for people to work for a society more just and compassionate.

Some applied lessons from the scriptures. Rabbi Michael Lerner read: "When you offer your compassion to the hungry and satisfy the famished creatures, then shall your light shine in darkness."

Muslim Minister Keith Muhammad suggested that the world today operates like a Monopoly game, ruled by those with money. He said, "We're in a world where greed has become a way of life."

At several times during the service, the assembly was led in song. Copies of lyrics of old familiar songs had been handed out earlier. One of the most moving songs was, "Sometimes I feel like a motherless child, a long way from home."

The closing talk was given by Friar Louie Vitale, a man much loved and respected for his many years of activism in the struggle for peace and justice.

Preparations began for the night-long vigil. Candles were lit. There were more songs and more people spoke. Lutheran pastor Rev. Sharon Stalkfleet focused particularly on the vulnerability of homeless youth. The singing of the movement anthem, "We Shall Overcome," marked the end of the formal program.

As people settled down for the night, an informal "open mike" ensued. One man appeared with a guitar and delighted everybody with his singing. There were some funny and some very touching stories. A young man told of just being 24 hours out of the hospital for drug use. "I just went to my first AA meeting," he said with pride, but, and his tone changed, he had no place to go. He was out of the hospital — and out on the street.

Thirty to forty people settled in for the vigil. Homeless people from the street joined with members of the faith community. Some people left after a time, some came later. A dozen or more stayed till it ended at 6 a.m. in the morning.

Virginia Hollins-Davidson of the Berkeley Unitarian Fellowship is one who stayed all night. Asked about her experience, she said, "For me it was exhilarating!" In spite of the noise and the bright lighting in the Plaza, she managed to sleep for almost four hours. She was prepared with warm clothes and three sleeping bags, so she didn't feel the cold concrete pavement. And she felt safe.

"Some people would probably be wary of being out there with people who are actually homeless," she said. "There was one guy next to me who clearly was chronically homeless. He had such a gentle look on his face." They exchanged names and talked a bit.

She felt totally safe and secure during the night. In the morning, those who had stayed shared coffee and pastries that had been donated. "Then we had a prayer and cleaned up. There was a real sense of camaraderie. It was great."

Sally Hindman, an organizer of the event, also stayed the night. She had quite a different take on the experience. "The situation on Shattuck is a real scene," she said. "From my one night out, I don't know how anybody gets sleep out there."

She described the noise, the bright lights, the cold, people dealing with mental health issues. That's why people forced to sleep on the streets choose to sleep in doorways in more private, out-of-the-way places. But then they are at risk of being attacked and having their possessions stolen.

Just one night was a powerful lesson in how miserable it is to be homeless. And for a homeless person in Berkeley, it can take two years of miserable nights to get into affordable housing.

Hindman suggests an interesting comparison between homeless people in our cities and people living in war zones and refugee camps and other areas of conflict around the world.

"It's like being a refugee in a camp," she said. "And you're not even in a camp with enough other people to provide a level of security. Like we have thousands of people in our country that are refugees just living in our doorways."

The Interfaith Working group is asking clergy, members of congregations, religious groups, seminary students and presidents and faculty members to put pressure on the City Council. The action on April 9 was their first protest of the anti-homeless laws. They will be producing an open letter from clergy and interfaith leaders to send to the Berkeley City Council.

In Hindman's words, "Our mission is to bring members of the City Council to their senses about the moral atrocity of criminalizing homeless people in the face of dire circumstances facing the poor.

"We will do everything that we can to stop the City Council from passing any laws which criminalize homeless people. We want to shine the light of our faith traditions on the wrong of these proposed actions."

Vigilers begin bedding down for the night at the BART Plaza. Lydia Gans photo

Rayven Wilson and Carena Ridgeway were the MCs at the event. *Lydia Gans photo*

As I went walking I saw a sign there
And on the sign it said "No Trespassing."
But on the other side it didn't say nothing
That side was made for you and me.

This Land Is Your Land

Words and Music by Woody Guthrie

This land is your land. This land is my land
From California to the New York island
From the redwood forest to the Gulf Stream waters
This land was made for you and me.

As I was walking that ribbon of highway
I saw above me that endless skyway
I saw below me that golden valley
This land was made for you and me.

I've roamed and rambled and I followed my footsteps
To the sparkling sands of her diamond deserts
And all around me a voice was sounding
This land was made for you and me.

When the sun came shining, and I was strolling
And the wheat fields waving and the dust clouds rolling
As the fog was lifting a voice was chanting
This land was made for you and me.

As I went walking I saw a sign there
And on the sign it said "No Trespassing."
But on the other side it didn't say nothing
That side was made for you and me.

In the shadow of the steeple I saw my people
By the relief office I seen my people
As they stood there hungry, I stood there asking
Is this land made for you and me?

Nobody living can ever stop me,
As I go walking that freedom highway
Nobody living can ever make me turn back
This land was made for you and me.

Faith Leaders Cry Out Against Inhumane Laws

from page 1

Now that Mayor Tom Bates and the Berkeley City Council have voted for a set of laws equally as mean-spirited and repressive as the Matrix program, Vitale felt compelled to step up once again to confront the cruelty of anti-homeless laws.

In an interview, Vitale said that all the world's faith traditions teach that justice for the poorest of the poor is at the very heart of their belief. Vitale said, "Pope Francis has said over and over that our number-one concern is about the homeless people. He constantly says that what it means to be a member of the human community is to look out for each other.

"Every one of the religions, that's what they mostly talk about. I don't care if it's Christian, Muslim, Buddhist or whatever, they all have this same direction given to them by their faith. I've learned from all of these various faiths."

Voicing the same reverence for all life expressed by St. Francis in his canticles, Vitale said, "We have this beautiful, wonderful world created to take care of all of us, and our number-one obligation is to share it with one another."

The Franciscan friar contrasted the heartless attitude of Berkeley business owners and politicians with the spirit of caring he has often observed among very poor people who have so much less.

Vitale said, "One thing I've always noticed among the homeless community is that people help each other, and often help much more than those who have more economic opportunities. I feel that kind of sharing is what we're here for."

Many people gather in downtown Berkeley for an interfaith rally in solidarity with homeless people. Alex Madonik photo

RABBI JANE LITMAN

CRIMINALIZING HOMELESSNESS IS IMMORAL.

Rabbi Jane Rachel Litman, a Berkeley resident and the rabbi at Coastside Jewish Community, offered an inspiring defense of homeless people at the rally on April 9 near the Berkeley BART station.

"Criminalizing homelessness is immoral," she said. "It's hard enough to be a homeless person. Our religious tradition teaches that we need to care for the underclass and not criminalize them. It's really appalling, and it's a violation of the will of the people of Berkeley who voted specifically against that social policy in 2012."

Rabbi Litman said the laws are not only inhumane, but senseless from a policy standpoint as well. "It's not only immoral, it's also foolish on a pragmatic level," she said. "It costs so much more to criminalize homeless people, not only in terms of money, but also the social costs are very high in terms of wasted lives. Whereas finding people homes would be cheaper and more socially beneficial."

Rabbi Litman noted that the interfaith rally on April 9 was held during Passover, which began this year on Friday evening, April 3, and ended after sunset on Saturday, April 11.

At the rally, Litman told the Passover story about the slaves who had escaped from Egypt and were at the shores of the Red Sea. Chariots were right behind them, but when Moses took his staff and rose it over the Red Sea, nothing happened, according to Jewish tradition.

One man waded into the Red Sea, first up to his ankles, then up to his hips and finally all the way up to his lips. At that moment when he was about to drown, he kept wading and only then did the sea finally open.

"That's us," said Rabbi Litman. "We need to wade in. We can't think that we're going to just stand on the shores and wave a staff." The lesson for homeless advocates in Berkeley, she said, is that we cannot remain on the sidelines and we cannot be hopeless.

"We have to wade in all the way," she said, "and keep testifying that the sea of greed and corruption and apathy and injustice will part as we declare our faith by walking and speaking."

Litman said the interfaith rally was extremely powerful and praised Sally Hindman, a Quaker and longtime homeless advocate, for bringing together people of faith in support of justice.

"I was extremely moved and proud that we came together on this important issue," said Rabbi Litman. "Sally Hindman is an incredibly dedicated and visionary person. She is tireless in her commitment to doing the right thing."

RABBI MICHAEL LERNER

SET THE OPPRESSED FREE AND BREAK EVERY YOKE.

Rabbi Michael Lerner, rabbi of Beyt Tikkun and editor of *Tikkun* magazine, said that Berkeley had turned its back on its own progressive history in violating the human rights of poor people.

"It's a terrible shame that the city which is famous for being on the liberal and progressive edge of the issues turns their backs on the homeless, on the poor, on the hungry," Lerner said. "It's an outrage."

Rabbi Lerner then read a passage from Isaiah as a prophetic message to Berkeley politicians:

"Is not this the fast I have chosen: to break the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter — when you see the naked to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?" *(Isaiah* 58:6-7)

MINISTER KEITH MUHAMMAD

HUNGER DOESN'T SPELL CHRISTIAN, MUSLIM OR JEW. HUNGER IS HUNGER.

Oakland Minister Keith Muhammad from Mosque 26B delivered a stirring oration, one of the most inspiring of the day. Minister Muhammad reminded the gathering that the world's diverse faith traditions speak with one voice on the issue of justice and compassion for homeless and hungry people in our midst.

Muhammad said, "We are compelled by the word of God to do what we can to ensure that the poor man or woman or child that is lying in the street, that we accept the responsibility to lift them up, whether we know them or not, whether we are from the same faith tradition or not. Hunger doesn't spell Christian, Muslim or Jew. Hunger is hunger. And the answer for hunger is food. The answer for homelessness is shelter. The answer for nakedness is clothing."

Minister Muhammad said that in looking at "this world of people that suffer and struggle," he was reminded of the game of Monopoly because it "depicts the mindset of the world in which we live, a world ruled by evil and greed."

He said that Monopoly is a metaphor for the way landlords in the Bay Area try to get control over every square inch of property in order to make people pay and pay endlessly.

"If they want a one-bedroom apartment in Berkeley, make them pay $2000 a month," he said. "If they want a one-bedroom apartment in San Francisco, make them pay $3000 a month. If they want a one-bedroom apartment in Oakland, make them pay 1,800 a month."

Muhammad then dramatically described how housing prices in the Bay Area have skyrocketed. He asked how it could have happened that a home that was purchased 80 years ago for $5,000, and was resold 50 years ago for $40,00, then was sold again 10 years ago for $250,000, and was sold a few years ago for a half-million dollars. And now unscrupulous real estate dealers and banks have the nerve to charge $700,000 for the same house in a never-ending spiral.

Muhammad warned, "We're playing the game of Monopoly and we're losing. It is now producing a world of poor, struggling and suffering people. People who have lost their homes — not because they're not decent people. People who have little too eat — not because they're not decent people. "

REV. SHARON STALKFLEET

JESUS IS IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE POOR.

Rev. Sharon Stalkfleet, pastor of the Lutheran Church of the Cross in Berkeley, knows many people living on the street, in part because the YEAH youth shelter is located at the Lutheran Church. And every Wednesday, the church sponsors a spaghetti dinner that serves 100 people.

Rev. Stalkfleet said she attended the rally on April 9 to show solidarity with the people she has come to know.

"I care because I know a lot of people who are living on the streets," said Rev. Stalkfleet, "or who are fearful they're going to lose their homes or apartments and will end up living on the streets. So I was there to be in solidarity with people I already know. It is very important."

She spoke out strongly against the anti-homeless measures passed by the Berkeley City Council on March 17, and warned that there was a growing movement in the entire country to punish and banish homeless people.

"It's part of the movement in our country and our state and our city to criminalize the poor," said Rev. Stalkfleet. "It's inhumane and it's also rather ridiculous because these laws do not really serve any purpose except harassment. The laws themselves do not make anybody safer, and then you think of how much money will go into enforcement. And then homeless people are going to be in jail and will have to be dealing with fines and it just creates a circular problem for the poor."

Rev. Stalkfleet said many people have no alternative but to live on the street or in shelters due to soaring housing prices.

"Affordable housing is not affordable," she said. "And it's only going to get worse before anything gets better because the rents just keep getting higher and higher. It really makes it very difficult for people who have limited means to find a place to live. The people are not the problem. Being homeless is the problem and to treat a symptom by trying to push it away somewhere else where it will not be seen is very inhumane."

Speaking at the interfaith rally in support of homeless people is of central importance to her understanding of ministry, she said.

"Jesus said, When did you see me hungry and did not feed me, and when did you not clothe me? Jesus is in solidarity with the poor. The community is called to take care of each other and to love our neighbor. So as a community, we're falling short when we see people on the street and we criminalize them."

REV. THERESA NOVAK

TREAT PEOPLE AS THE PRECIOUS SOULS THAT THEY ARE.

Rev. Theresa Novak, an ordained minister with the Berkeley Fellowship of Unitarian-Universalists, offered a prayer for compassion at the rally.

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Faith Leaders Cry Out Against Inhumane Laws

from page 6

In an interview following the event, Rev. Novak said, "I really hate the way that our society is demonizing poor people. It's not just the homeless — it's all poor people. The homeless are the most vulnerable in our society. Everything about faith, about trying to live with human care and compassion, means that we need to treat people as human beings, as the precious souls that they are."

Rev. Novak said that the laws passed by the Berkeley City Council are completely inhumane. "They give people nowhere to go — absolutely nowhere to go," she said. "Our society is going in the wrong direction. We need to provide housing for folks before they end up on the streets. And to just say, 'Move along,' that's punishing the victims."

Novak explained that she came to the interfaith rally because the members of her Berkeley congregation asked her to do so. "I came to lend my voice and do religious witness on behalf of the vulnerable," she said. " It's part of my call as a minister. When I took my ordination vows, I vowed to minister to all people, regardless of their station in life.

"Our primary faith tenet as Unitarian-Universalists is to do what good we can in this life — and that means having compassion for our fellow human beings."

Carena Ridgeway, Rev. Kurt Kuhwald, Sally Hindman and Rayven Wilson organize the rally's speakers. Alex Madonik photo

Rabbi David Cooper

Elijah comes among us disguised as a homeless person.

Rabbi David Cooper of Kehilla Synagogue told the gathering that the biblical prophet Elijah is often disguised as a homeless person, in the legendary tradition. Cooper said that when these stories were told to him as a young boy, the message was that every homeless person you encounter should be treated with the same respect as you would treat the prophet.

That message has a great deal to say about how our society should treat homeless people. Rabbi Cooper explained, "Remember when you see a homeless person, you should treat them well because he could be the prophet Elijah. And even if he isn't the prophet Elijah, they should still be treated just as well."

One of Cooper's favorite stories about Elijah is a very timely metaphor about the laws passed on March 17 by the Berkeley City Council to banish homeless people.

Once, when Elijah came to a giant banquet in the guise of a homeless person, he was kicked out. (The persecution of homeless people is an age-old story.)

Yet when Elijah returned dressed in princely robes, the same people treated him as an honored guest and gave him banquet food and wine. Strangely, Elijah put the food in the pockets of his clothing, rather than eating it.

When asked why, Elijah said, "When I came in before dressed as a homeless person you kicked me out. But when I came back in wearing these beautiful clothes, I figured that the food that you provided me with was for my suit — and not for me."

This story from the folk tradition is now being lived out all over again on the streets of Berkeley, Rabbi Cooper said.

"I live in a town where we punish the homeless and where we reward the wealthy," he said. "And frankly, if Elijah the prophet were wandering among us, he would be really pissed off. And he would demand that we do some repentance."

Cooper said that we must make our society a place where people can have a place to sleep and food to eat and the medical care they need. "At that time," he said, "then maybe Elijah will be able to forgive us. So let us go forward and make this the world it should be, a world where Elijah would be happy."

Rev. Kurt Kuhwald

No one should be cast aside in our economic system.

Rev. Kurt Kuhwald, a Unitarian minister in the East Bay, helped to coordinate the interfaith rally. In an interview, he said, "I was there to support the right of homeless people to have a place in Berkeley without being harassed. It points to the egregious economic circumstances that we're faced with, where people are forced into homelessness and they're kept without housing."

Describing the anti-homeless laws in Berkeley, Rev. Kuhwald said, "I think they're intolerable. I think they demonstrate a meanness of spirit that is unacceptable, especially in a city like Berkeley. Berkeley is known for its liberality and its support of all people, so to promote these kinds of laws is unacceptable and immoral."

Berkeley officials have "no justification" for these laws, he said. "They could work these things out without criminalizing people, especially people who really have suffered as a result of a lot of things in this society that have worked against them."

Kuhwald pointed to economic inequality as a more deeply rooted source of the repressive, anti-homeless laws being enacted all over the country. "It's very clear that this country is on a trajectory right now that is saying plainly and loudly that everybody *isn't* equal and that some people are better than others," he said.

"For instance, CEOs are more important than people who work the line at McDonald's. People who are real estate agents and sell multimillion-dollar houses in the hills of Berkeley are more important than the people sleeping on the streets."

A society that favors the rich over the poor is practicing a very destructive kind of discrimination, he said. So protesting the anti-homeless laws is, at the same time, a moral statement against the inequality that has become so prevalent.

"There should be an economic vision that says that everybody in society is valuable, that no one should be cast aside in our economic system," Kuhwald said.

"As a person of faith, it was important for me to be there because I believe that at the core of all this, it's a moral issue. The moral issue points directly to the question of whether we really are all equal or not."

Rabbi David Cooper tells how Elijah appeared as a homeless man. Alex Madonik photo

Sally Hindman

"Seek justice and love kindness."

Sally Hindman, a Quaker and longtime homeless advocate, played a key role in organizing religious leaders from many diverse interfaith communities to come together as one and speak out for the human rights of homeless people.

Hindman said, "We have a clear calling that we are to work for justice. I feel like I could not be a Quaker, I could not be a Christian, and not speak up about how wrong this is. It is so wrong to criminalize homeless people."

The City Council's latest anti-homeless measures are similar to Measure S, the anti-sitting law that Berkeley voters rejected in 2012. Hindman questioned why the mayor and council are trying to pass laws already turned down by voters in the last election.

"Criminalizing homeless people is not going to work," she said. "It's 10 times more expensive than social services, and it's wrong. It has been criticized as an approach to solving these problems by some of the most respected policy-making bodies in America. It was voted *down* by Berkeley voters in 2012. No one with a conscience would support it."

"Every human being deserves the dignity and the respect of having a home," she added. 'And there isn't a reason in the world why we can't do that. We're the richest country in the world. We have 536 billionaires in this country. And we have to quit pretending like we don't have the resources to end all poverty."

On March 2, 2015, *U.S. News & World Report* reported that there are 536 billionaires in the United States. The United States has the majority of the world's billionaires, and it has the lion's share of the world's wealth and resources.

Recently, the United Nations Human Rights Committee in Geneva condemned the criminalization of homelessness in the United States as "cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment." UN officials also said they were baffled that such a wealthy country not only had such high levels of homelessness, but also criminalized those living on the streets.

Hindman echoed the UN Committee's questions. She said, "The U.S. by any stretch is one of the richest countries in the world, and we have the resources to end homelessness *tomorrow*. This situation, where hundreds of thousands of our citizens are forced to live in doorways in urban areas, with all their worldly possessions in supermarket carts, is morally unacceptable. It's unacceptable in Berkeley and it's unacceptable across America."

Hindman said she had been reflecting on the prophet Micah: "What does the Lord require of you? To seek justice, and love kindness, and walk humbly with the Lord."

"That calls us *away* from criminalizing people who are merely struggling to survive," she said. "It calls us to pursue compassionate solutions to these challenges."

Basic Dignity Campaign Launched in Santa Cruz

"We have to do better — better for people experiencing homelessness, better for our community, better for ourselves. Let's hope that now is the time for basic dignity, an idea whose time has surely come." — Rabbi Phil Posner

The "Posner Pottie" is the first of its kind and provides 24-hour restroom access.

by Steve Pleich

Some years ago, San Diego County partnered with local nonprofits to provide "basic dignity" to people experiencing homelessness in the form of increased access to bathroom facilities. It has long been the hope of homeless advocates in Santa Cruz that such an idea could find some traction in a community where this need is so great.

Indeed, in Santa Cruz, the situation is dire and reflects a generalized and pervasive bias against the homeless community. For the unhoused in Santa Cruz, the simple act of relieving themselves without public restroom access is just one more instance of having to sacrifice their basic dignity as human beings just to survive.

As Housing NOW Santa Cruz founding member Linda Lemaster said, "It is bad enough that homeless people are criminalized in our community. Do we really have to humiliate them as well?"

Santa Cruz does have some history of city-sponsored programs to increase downtown bathroom access. A Bathroom Task Force was formed in 1999 with some support from the City Council which set up "temporary" porta-potties in the downtown area.

HUFF (Homeless United for Friendship and Freedom) founder Robert Norse recalled this effort and the reasons for its demise. "Whatever promise this program had in making bathroom facilities more available to the homeless community was eventually beaten back and ultimately beaten down with 'vandalism' mythology," Norse said.

"The bathrooms are long gone but the mythology lingers and continues to generate substantial resistance to progress, even in the form of simply revisiting the idea."

The proposal currently being recommended to the City Council would involve a public/private partnership between "Basic Dignity Campaign Santa Cruz" and the City. It is worth noting that this type of collaborative effort has successfully worked in Santa Cruz to reopen public facilities that have had their hours reduced or have been closed completely due to lack of funding.

The fiscal reality is that that there are many demands on the city's budget and other city services and programs occupy higher budgetary priorities. But Rabbi Phil Posner, whose "Camp of Last Resort" program is challenging the city to create safe sleeping spaces for people experiencing homelessness, holds out some hope.

"Discussion and consideration of this proposal may pave the way for a realistic approach to this pressing need," Rabbi Posner said. "And additional bathroom facilities in the downtown area could benefit the entire community, not just those people experiencing homelessness. Additional bathroom facilities along the San Lorenzo Riverway could support both our camp proposal and the ongoing program to revitalize that area of the city."

Funding for this program would be secured through private contributions and donations. No public funds would be used for the purchase or rental of portable or semi-permanent bathroom units.

Depending on the amount of money raised, these units could range from the basic "porta-pottie" to full-service bathroom facilities like the "Portland Loo" produced by Madden Fabrication.

The Portland Loos are simple, sturdy, flush toilet kiosks, which provide environmentally friendly, clean, and safe restroom facilities. This is the ideal solution if we truly want to accord people experiencing homelessness not only basic dignity, but also a sense of belonging to a compassionate community that understands their daily challenges.

The City's participation would take the form of installation and maintenance of the new facilities through Public Works and oversight by the Parks and Recreation Department and the Santa Cruz Police Department, depending on placement.

Of course, any program such as this will require much thought, planning and public process. But homeless advocates and even some civic leaders believe this is an ideal time for consideration of the idea of "basic dignity."

Santa Cruz City Councilmember Micah Posner was instrumental in the placement of the only 24-hour-access restroom in the downtown area. Aptly nicknamed the "Posner Pottie," this first-of-its-kind facility could serve as a community icebreaker on the issue.

Posner's father, Rabbi Phil, echoed the sentiments of many when he said, "We have to do better — better for people experiencing homelessness, better for our community, better for ourselves. Let's hope that now is the time for basic dignity, an idea whose time has surely come."

Steve Pleich is an advocate for people experiencing homelessness in Santa Cruz.

Book Club in Jail and the Lost Pink Umbrella

by Carol Denney

The Right to Rest rally in Sacramento had to carry on without me. But I met a lot of the people it would really help over the three days I spent enjoying the hospitality of, first, the Berkeley Jail, then the North County Jail, waiting for an arraignment that never came.

I met great women: strong, honest, clear-minded about their own failings and willing to climb any mountain of any size to help their families stay together. We talked a lot. Some of them could trade encouragement with their boyfriends in nearby cells and plan a little for the unknowns, their potential release or the potential of a lengthy stay.

They were loving and warm with each other and to me. Some were new to jail routine and some had enough experience to help others navigate with less terror.

But mostly we talked about housing. Almost everyone was doubled up with friends, maxing out somebody's basement space, jeopardizing friendships and family relations, straining to find harbor near their jobs if they had no cars, and losing jobs because of transportation and economic issues. We traded tips and ideas for job sharing, space sharing, what it's like in other states where we had relatives and possibilities, anything. These women are resourceful, kind, and focused.

They knew that wealthy people were playing games with the housing supply, and that as mostly black women, the discrimination they faced stacked the deck against them. Yet they managed to make the stories of their struggles wonderfully funny. "They can't beat me," one of my cell-mates said. "I have my son and I am going to make things right."

I kept thinking about Berkeley City Councilmember Lori Droste's declaration on March 17, the night she affirmed her support for the next round of anti-homeless laws promoted by the City Council and Downtown Berkeley Association by suggesting that going to jail was really good for people. People who support jail-filling policies love that concept: that jail makes people straighten up and fly right.

There might be some logic to that if people needed a wake-up call. But like me, most of the women in jail with me were bewildered about their arrests. Most of them had called the police themselves for help and been inexplicably jailed, or were caught up in a melee and inexplicably jailed, or, like me, were inexplicably jailed by a cop who had some peculiar back story about me from some other political event or moment in time of which I have long stopped keeping track.

We're a pretty focused group, Councilmember Droste. Three days in jail without even a court date is not just illegal, it's a pretty good recipe for having your car towed, your job lost, your responsibilities left hanging in precarious ways. And the green-suited Santa Rita gals, the ones with mental health challenges, well, I doubt even you are going to argue that jail is the best place for them. They, too, were a sweet bunch doing their best to help each other stay clear-minded through a trying day.

It's cold in there, Councilmember Droste. It's freezing if they rammed down your door and took you away in your night clothes. Some of the police are brutal, and think nothing of using the worst profanity and mind-numbing disrespect. And no matter how much of that one endures, it doesn't create more housing, which is the only answer to homelessness.

At one point we began talking about books, and I had to laugh, since one of the books they'd given me in the Berkeley jail was a raunchy tale about police corruption. It had made me wonder about the depth of their jail library, which also had a copy of English author and medievalist scholar M. R. James's annotated ghost stories. But after we laughed about that, I mentioned Michele Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*, which others recommended as well. The discussion we had was so moving. We talked for hours about the book which explains so clearly the nonsensical system which allows police and courts to upend whole communities.

I did learn something, though, Councilmember Droste. When I was finally reunited with my property — after being released in Oakland with no money, no phone, no identification, nothing, since it was all back at the Berkeley jail, an arrangement which is apparently routine — I realized they had neglected to note that I had had with me a pink umbrella. Either they honestly think a pink umbrella somehow continues to be pertinent to charges they have dropped, or Officer Kassenbaum really, really wanted a pink umbrella.

Please find money in the budget for pink umbrellas for the officers who are currently obligated to invent exotic ways to acquire them, Councilmember Droste. I really wanted to attend the Right to Rest rally in Sacramento, but hey, Officer Kassenbaum, when you're jonesing for a pink umbrella, I guess something's gotta give.

God Walked In

Haiku by Carol Denney

god walked into church
and was thrown out because he
seemed kind of crazy

I weep for the suffering

by Judy Joy Jones

I weep for the suffering on earth
and rejoice in those that give
knowing god smiles
from shore to shore
when we offer our hand
to those in need

beyond homelessness
and hunger go we
hearts entwined
with heaven's designs
to spread unconditional love
to all we meet

I weep for the suffering on earth

Homeless Streets 2015

by George Wynn

Where are we
as a society?

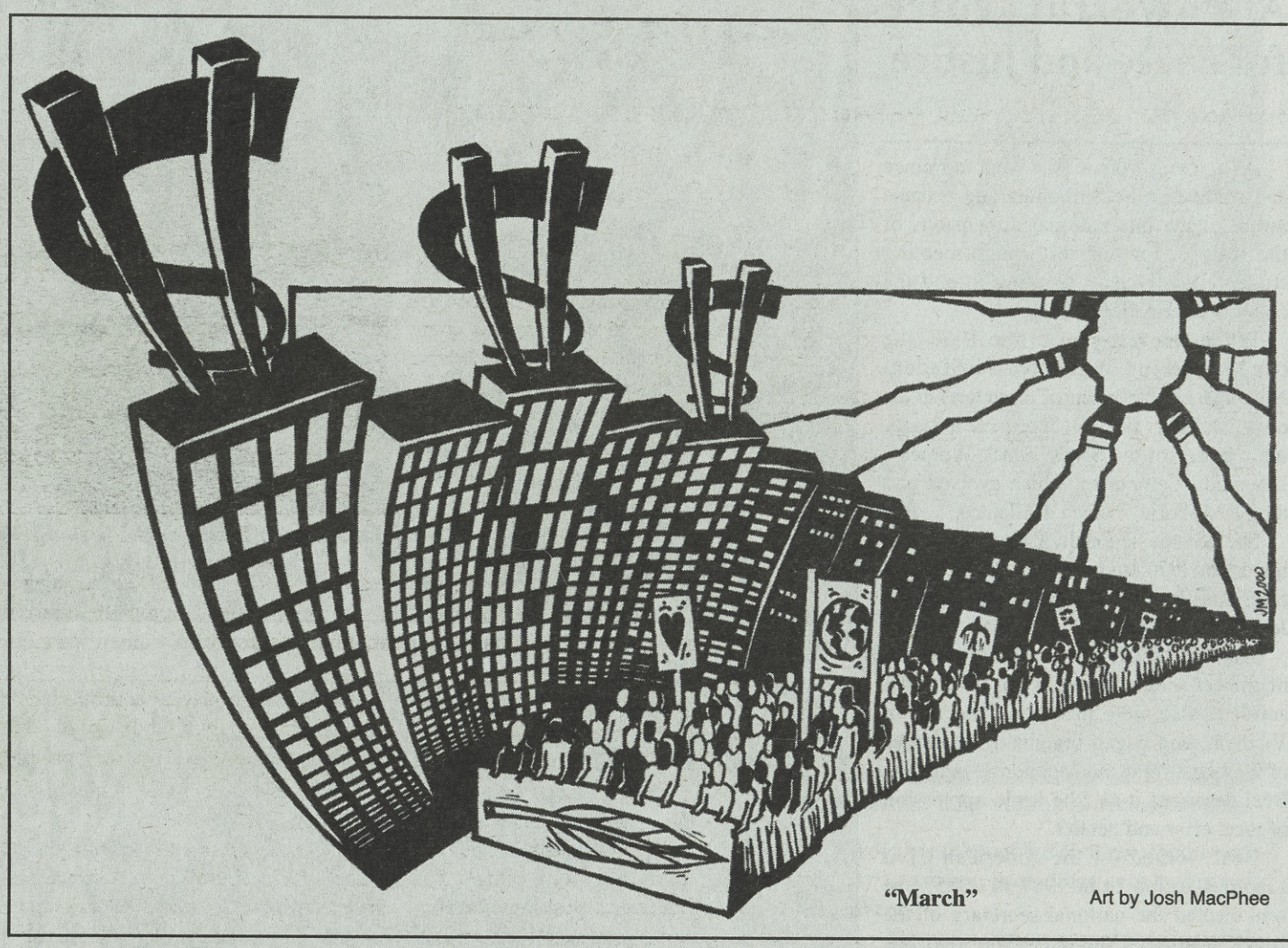
Not looking
at everyday reality
because someone's
hands may not
be clean

We are about
reaching out
from the heart

And our
heart is out
at sea.

Planning For People, Not for Profiteers

Someone making minimum wage would have to work 163 hours a week in Oakland and 212 hours a week in San Francisco to be able to afford housing.



"March" Art by Josh MacPhee

by Dawn Phillips

Neighborhoods that have seen decades of public and private disinvestment, environmental degradation and racist segregation are now being flooded with an influx of new capital, new developments and new residents. Is this new wave of investment actually good for people and neighborhoods? Who really benefits from urban development?

The regional median home price in the Bay Area at the end of 2014 was $742,900. This means that to afford a home, you would need a 20 percent down payment of $150,000 and could expect a monthly mortgage of $3,323.79.

Cash investors account for one in five of all home sales and there is a growing number of absentee buyers. Waypoint Real Estate Investment Group has spent $1 billion purchasing hundreds of single-family homes in Oakland and Contra Costa County. Wall Street-backed investment firms like Colony Capital, Blackstone and Och-Ziff are literally buying up neighborhoods around the country and making it impossible for anyone who cannot afford an "all cash" purchase to acquire homes in these communities.

This type of speculation has contributed significantly to rising prices and deepening disparities in homeownership rates for Latino and Black families.

Proposals for big development projects are popping up all over the Bay Area.

In San Francisco, Maximus Real Estate Partners is proposing to build 345 units of luxury condos with retail space above the 16th and Mission BART Station right next to an elementary school. The 10-story-tall project will cast a permanent shadow on the school playground, increase the housing prices in the surrounding area, and raise commercial rents for small mom-and-pop businesses.

Hundreds of teachers, students, parents, and neighborhood business owners have organized a powerful coalition to demand that the project be 100 per cent affordable in a community hard hit by evictions, displacement of Latino residents and longtime small businesses.

It took community residents and organizations coming together to ensure that a proposal to develop a huge section of East Oakland would include plans to stabilize current residents, provide affordable housing and provide jobs to those in the area.

One resident described her view of the Coliseum City project as "feeling like it didn't include those who live [nearby], and that the development would be an 'alien space city' plopped down in East Oakland. We're here now, so let's move you out!"

While the project promises to create 20,000 jobs over a 25-year period, there is no guarantee that current workers would keep the jobs or that the new positions would be union. It covers an area between the Oakland Airport and the Coliseum BART station, and includes multiple parcels of public land. There are many concerns about how that land will serve the needs of current East Oakland residents.

Residents in the San Antonio neighborhood of Oakland are opposing a plan to sell a city-owned parcel to a developer who wants to build a 24-story project with 298 luxury units. The land is in a prime location on the edge of Lake Merritt and the city's proposal to sell it far under market value to a small group of hand-picked bidders has raised serious opposition.

Projected rents for a one-bedroom unit in the building will be $3,150 a month, making the units affordable to households with $113,000 or more in annual income. According to US Census data, the median household income for the zip code that includes the neighborhood is $38,363 a year. It is clear that, if approved, this project will not serve the affordable housing needs of the neighborhood. It likely will drive up the cost of living in this working-class community with a large and diverse immigrant population.

There is a widely held view that historically disinvested and neglected neighborhoods should welcome all new developments. This view holds that any investment is better than none at all. For many residents of those neighborhoods, the opposite feels true. Working-class Blacks and Latinos are being displaced at incredible rates from their neighborhoods.

In Oakland, you have to make $8,000 a month to afford the median monthly rent of $2412, and in San Francisco you have to make $10,400 a month to afford the median rent of $3,100. Someone making minimum wage would have to work 163 hours a week in Oakland and 212 hours a week in San Francisco to be able to afford housing.

This affordability crisis is compounded by the fact that real wages for Blacks and Latinos have decreased in the Bay Area over the last decade. The argument that producing new housing will solve the crisis feels like a limited solution. Racial and economic inequity is deepening and the current approach to development is contributing to that, not helping it.

We hear too often from our elected representatives and public agency staff that we cannot make demands of private developers who are coming in with ideas and money, for fear that we will scare off investors. A large part of this problem is the over-reliance on the private sector to drive urban development.

The public sector sees its role as facilitating and supporting private development through public policy and spending. It is common practice for cities to ease existing land use and building regulations, as well as providing generous public subsidies to encourage private investment. Twitter successfully negotiated a payroll tax break from San Francisco in exchange for staying in the city and expanding.

Forest City received almost $61 million to develop the Uptown project in Oakland, a huge sum for a city with a modest budget. For both cities, this is a standard part of doing business and promoting development.

This type of development results in a severe mismatch between the needs of residents and the profit-motivated interest of those driving urban development. While our communities are crying out for basic infrastructure like grocery stores, retail stores that serve families, and low-cost housing for a range of family sizes, what often gets prioritized are new businesses and services designed for new, higher-income residents, not the projects that benefit existing residents.

This approach that focuses development on serving new, future residents requires and facilitates the displacement of current residents and businesses, as well as social, cultural, faith and political institutions that serve the community.

Luxury condos, high-end bars, restaurants and retail are not making our communities healthier or more sustainable. For those on the front-lines of the gentrification crisis, it feels like the public sector has made landlords and private developers rich at the expense of working-class communities of color.

We want development to be driven by the leadership and vision of current residents. We want our public representatives and agencies to ensure that residents are fully informed and deeply engaged in projects that are coming to their neighborhoods. We want residents to have the ability to participate in actual decision-making around the types of development and who the developers are. We want development to be driven by those who will be most impacted by it.

We want 30 per cent of all land in working-class communities set aside for community-controlled, community-driven projects. We want our public agencies to stop the sale of all public land to private entities. We want to see existing land trust and land banks expanded.

We want to see the creation of mechanisms that will support collective ownership and control of land for green space, housing, health, job creation, urban agriculture and other community-serving needs. We want community control of land as a way to stabilize and strengthen our communities.

We want to see tenant rights and protections in all cities throughout the region and we want to see the preservation and improvement of the rental housing stock. We want all jurisdictions to pass and fully enforce Just Cause and Rent Control. We want to see public revenues and programs dedicated to improving the quality of older buildings and housing.

We want stronger enforcement of building and health codes that do not result in the displacement of residents from their homes. We want to see housing made more affordable, healthy and sustainable for all residents.

Human development empowers a community to identify the types of housing, services and infrastructure that should be located in their neighborhood. It ensures that the interest and needs of longtime residents play a central role in defining the vision for neighborhood development and change. It supports resident leadership by providing resources, tools and information to support their full engagement.

A human development approach also centralizes decision-making power in the community and ensures that residents are not only able to offer their opinions, but that they have actual decision-making ability to say what development looks like in their neighborhood. This approach to community development fosters institutions and enterprises that are of value to the residents, puts protections in place that prevent displacement and gentrification, and results in positive human development outcomes for all residents.

This is our vision for a new urban agenda centered on racial and economic equity and a healthy society for all people. Human development driven by the needs of working-class communities of color will create neighborhoods and cities that work better for everyone.

This is a call to action. Join us.

Dawn Phillips is the Co-Director of Programs at Causa Justa :: Just Cause and can be reached at dawn@cjjc.org or #HousingisaHumanRight@CausaJusta1

Frances Beal

A Powerful Voice for Peace and Justice

from page 1

As a young woman, she went to France and studied at the Sorbonne, and became aware of the international dimensions of the struggle for justice through meeting students involved in working to end the colonial domination of Algeria.

When she returned to the U.S., she began working with SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) in the early 1960s. In 1968, Beal became a founding member of the SNCC Black Women's Liberation Committee, which evolved into the Third World Women's Alliance.

She became nationally known due to her important 1970 study of the intersection of race, class and gender oppression, "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female."

Frances Beal is a living link to the era of radical social change when civil rights activists also were protesting the war in Vietnam, and began organizing on issues of women's rights and economic injustice. Beal describes it as "the triple oppression of race, class and gender."

Beal worked for the American Civil Liberties Union from 1987 to 2005. She was elected the national secretary of the Black Radical Congress. She also has been a lifelong peace activist, and her antiwar commitment stretches from protesting the Vietnam War in the 1960s all the way to her recent opposition to the war in Iraq and the Middle East.

I think of the boar symbolism in the movie, "Beasts of the Southern Wild" about a six-year-old black girl and her father in Mississippi. The boars, protecting and companioning black and white children, were for me symbols of wit and courage, and of a God beyond gender, as in former pagan times they had godlike qualities. They are related, for me, to the stamina of Francis M. Beal.

Beal's life also seems related to Oakland artist Charles Curtis Blackwell's religious poetry concerning biblical women and modern women he personally knew. In his books, *Is the Color of Mississippi Mud* and *Redemption in Blindness,* he definitely expresses belief in women's rights, supporting and strengthening her stance.

While I was preparing the *Street Spirit* interview, I saw the new documentary, "She's Beautiful When She's Angry" at her suggestion, which featured Beal as she spoke out on women's rights. I was extremely impressed with her sincerity and conviction. The film is a documentary history of the early years of the modern women's movement, from 1966 to 1971.

In this important and very well-reviewed new film,"She's Beautiful When She's Angry," Frances Beal is featured several times speaking for women's rights.

In the *Village Voice* review of the film, Alan Scherstuhl called it"one of the year's best films." He added, "That defiant sisterhood changed the workplace, our sexual politics, our language. 'She's Beautiful When She's Angry' is the best filmed account of how that happened you could ever expect to see."

Ms. Magazine reviewer Kitty Lindsay wrote, "A feminist film masterpiece. Offers an inspiring account of the women's liberation movement of the late 1960s."

Frances M. Beal is meaningful to me because she is a woman willing to struggle for the rights of the vulnerable, especially for women's rights, lesbian rights, and for economic justice and equal job opportunities for low-income people. That is why I was inspired to interview her for *Street Spirit.*

Already a mainstay of the civil rights movement, African-American women were also pioneers in fighting for women's rights.

"She's Beautiful When She's Angry" is a powerful film that documents the early stages of the modern women's movement.

Street Spirit Interview with Frances Beal

Interview by Maureen Hartmann

Maureen Hartmann: *Can you describe your family and upbringing? And how did this affect your later work for human rights?*

Frances M. Beal: I come from a working-class family. My father was a truck driver. My mother was a housewife — her job during those days. My mother came from an immigrant Jewish family. My grandfather was very involved in politics.

My mother was the first child born in America. They entered the United States in the early 1900s. The two older siblings were born in Denmark, because that was the country that was taking refugee Jews at the time. My father was born in 1904, so they were about ten years apart.

Having an African-American father and a Jewish mother in a town that was very reactionary was difficult for the children. All children want to belong, and I had a great need in that direction. I fortunately took it out in a positive way, by trying to be the best of everything: the best reader, the best mathematician, the best in trying out for sports, the best in trying out for music.

My mother didn't make things easier. Aside from being Jewish in an anti-Semitic town, she also was a member of the Communist Party involved in labor organizing. My mother protested in front of "Birth of a Nation," which was a very racist film that was produced at the time. I can remember as a child being embarrassed. Why does my mother have to do this?

My father was no less a conscious person as a black man. He was part Native American. By that time he was a labor organizer, and it was kind of rough there too. My father told of the bosses coming around with thugs. The gangsters were the truck-owners in the life within which I grew up.

Even though on a superficial level, you don't want your parents to be different from everybody else; on another level, you're learning about injustice. My mother had a lot of educational material for us kids. I remember one book (at home), *The Pictorial History of the Negro People in America* by Langston Hughes. Black history had, of course, not even begun to be thought about in terms of transformation of the educational system.

I'll give you an example of what my mother was like. The teacher was teaching about slavery as a benign system for giving food, for giving clothing. The slaves had all these things given to them, unlike other people. Mom made sure we kids confronted this view in the classroom and insist slavery was a system where people got beaten, they could not go where they wanted to go and families got split up.

African-Americans did not sit there and take it: there were all kinds of resistance. For inequities, you have a personal and political and social responsibility to do something about it. My mother, because she was a communist, was concerned about class and racial issues, but also gender issues. She was also interested in the struggle for peace. Growing up in a small town with progressive parents — that was my background.

Hartmann: *When did you get married and start your own family?*

Beal: I went abroad to France in my junior year. My husband had been in the Navy. He was on a ship that went around the Mediterranean. Racial relations in the mid-'50s in the United States were not pretty. One of the murders that affected me then was that of Emmett Till, a 14-year-old boy, suspected of flirting with a white woman in Mississippi.

Both my daughters were born in France. We stayed for six years. I attended the Sorbonne. There I started to raise a family. The marriage was not on the best of grounds. There was a lot of passion and I knew my husband since I was 15 years old. We began having a good time living in Paris. But once the kids came it was a little different. The other problem — he was an alcoholic. He would go out and drink. He came from a family that was a series of alcoholics. They did not just take a drink too much now and then; they were clinical alcoholics.

After the kids came, we grew apart, so we decided to come home to dissolve the marriage, where we have family. When I asked him for child support for the kids, however, he would see it as asking for money for me.

Hartmann: *How did you begin working for civil rights and social change?*

Beal: The good thing that happened, my ex hooked up with a woman from Denmark who was very fond of the girls and encouraged him to pay child support. My mother and my brothers provided moral support and helped me with child rearing.

I went to work to support my family and was lucky to land a job at the National Council of Negro Women. I had concerns and involvement in the Civil Rights movement and the women's rights movement, and felt I could get a position there.

This was during the period of the Vietnam War. All of us were protesting. It was a question of a war which was not

See **Interview with Frances Beal** *page 11*

The *Street Spirit* Interview with Frances M. Beal

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justified, and in which the U.S. was an aggressor. It was a new concept for America.

Blacks had a history of struggling for peace. There was a 1935 demonstration of 50,000 people in Harlem, protesting the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. We have our African American spokespersons like W.E.B. DuBois and Paul Robeson.

Finally, I connected with the Civil Rights movement. I started to work with the International Affairs Commission of SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee). While I was in France, I got a sense of the anti-colonial struggle on a world-wide basis. I was in some café discussions with some Africans. I also came across an old copy of Simon de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*.

When I came back here, it was mostly to civil rights contacts. I spoke French, and I had already an international contact with SNCC.

Hartmann: *How did you become involved with the Women's Movement?*

Beal: How I became involved in the Woman's Movement was very interesting. I was working with an entity of SNCC, called the National Black Antiwar Antidraft Union. The purpose was to discourage young blacks from going off to war. Most of the staff was female.

What really angered us was that James Forman, a SNCC leader, was pushing for a political alliance with the Panthers. We were concerned about how women were treated and how they were oppressed within that organization. He came back with a book by Eldridge Cleaver, called *Soul on Ice*. We came to the conclusion that Eldridge Cleaver was a thug who raped black women to work himself up to raping white women. We wrote a response to that book, called *Soul on Fire*.

Other female issues began to concern us. We found many black women had been sterilized without their knowledge. That convinced us of the need for good, safe, birth-control methods. The abortion issue was one that the right-wing made the focus. It was not just an assault on women's abortion rights: it was an assault on women's right to birth control. That is how I became an active voice for black women's liberation.

Hartmann: *What originally sparked your determination to become so involved in the struggle for civil rights?*

Beal: I was living in France at the time and I did some writing explaining the Civil Rights movement. In France, we saw the news of Little Rock, Arkansas, and Eisenhower sending troops in.

[Editor: In 1957, after Arkansas Gov. Orval Faubus ordered the Arkansas National Guard to prevent black students from enrolling in an all-white high school in Little Rock, President Eisenhower sent in federal troops to allow the students to attend the formerly segregated school.]

The U.S. was in the so-called Cold War, the fight for democracy against the Soviet Union. Yet here the U.S. was oppressing its own people, Negroes as we called ourselves.

Frances Beal was one of the first to explain the "triple oppression" of race, class and gender faced by African American women.

In many states, you lose your right to vote for life, or in California, you lose for the length of your furlough. I worked with Michelle Alexander in the ACLU on racial profiling issues. Her book documents the mass incarceration of African Americans and calls it the new civil rights issue.

Hartmann: *When you returned to the United States, how did your involvement in civil rights organizing lead you on to peace activism and women's rights?*

Beal: I participated in some of the civil rights demonstrations as well as local struggles for welfare rights and the fight to legalize abortion in New York. During the March on Washington in 1963, I was 8-1/2 months pregnant at the time with my second daughter, Lisa. SNNC was pulling people together and organizing for the March which brought 250,000 people to the nation's capital, the largest mass demonstration ever at that time.

As the Third World Women's Alliance, we participated in anti-nuclear demonstrations. We were involved in civil rights and gender rights struggles, and there was the moral question of dropping bombs that would eliminate large numbers of people. There was the idea that the end of the world could have taken place, if some idiot had pressed the red button.

During that period, a lot of the focus was on Vietnam. It had been raised in Congress that nuclear weapons be used against the Vietnamese people.

In the late sixties and early seventies, the beginning stages of the women's movement took place. Some women were beginning to feel like second-class citizens within the anti-war movement, as well as working in the anti-racist movement. That was the birth of the modern-day women right's movement.

Women of all classes and races participated in what became known as the women's liberation movement. That's what the new film, "She's Beautiful When She's Angry," tries to document.

We were no longer prepared to accept a lot of anti-female attitudes, all the way from abortion to equality on the job to equality within social justice movements. SNCC had women doing things they had never done before, running meetings and creating agendas.

Hartmann: *Do you believe we have we progressed in inter-racial relations since 1963?*

Beal: There has been some progress since then, but we have a long way to go. We have to realize that interracial justice also involves Asians, Latinos, and Native Americans. We see a child of more than one race, and we are not as shocked as in 1963. People still say, it is all right for you, but think of the children, their identity questions, how other people perceive them.

There has been some progress. We have mixed-race people on a massive level. We still have people who talk about that as a bad thing. We have moved beyond the raw racism of the 1960s, but race is still a defining issue so far as educational and economic opportunities are concerned. And as the Trevor Martin case shows, a white man can gun down a black male child and an all-white jury will set him free. Yes, race still matters.

Hartmann: *What do you think happened with racial relations as a result of Martin Luther King's assassination?*

Beal: I think there was an immediate response. "Martin Luther King was one of the bravest black men we have lost in this struggle," as Ossie Davis said at his funeral. Amongst blacks, some of my students did not know who he was just five years later. He was a person calling for racial justice. A lot of people took up the struggle. What united them was that he and Malcolm X were both proposing racial justice in America. Both were murdered. When you look around today, and you see the assaults on young black men, and white men getting away with it, you realize we have not advanced very far. Black lives matter.

Massive incarceration of young black people in this country has become a goal, a tool, for controlling the black population. It's also denying people the right to vote. In many states, you lose your right to vote for life, or in California, you lose for the length of your furlough. I worked with Michelle Alexander in the ACLU on racial profiling issues. Her book documents the mass incarceration of African Americans and calls it the new civil rights issue.

Falling

by Peter Marin

Can they be other than they are,
silent as rock, the pine
tree bending slowly,
the sea-mist cool and pure?
Can they be other —
not flesh, not memory,
not the brute creatures pursued by
cops mad to keep order? Blood,
says the report, 2.5, so drunk he
could not, pissing, balance, falling
15 feet straight down,
breaking 2 teeth, 3 ribs
and the surface of shallow water
to hit the mute rocks below.

Silence Breaking

by Ryan Smith

Silence breaking as the day is brewing.
Blankets creasing, sleeping is ceasing.
Pack my bag, Leave the spot, not wanting a snag.
Cars passing, soon were blazing.
Rip, pack, click, pull, exhale, cough, pass.
Glass on glass avoid adding carcinogens to the grass.
If it is good you may know fast,
but you've had amazing creeper in the past.
On the block, beats drive by, birds sing in the sky,
Leaves rustle before they lay.
Footsteps on the ground, a mixing of sound,
blending the noises
the ear has found a collage of what is around.
The music made by a college town.

Virtue Reward Me

by Adam Allen

Virtue reward me as I strip the bark from a tree.
Will you kindle my passion to do the good?
Whole log on leaping flames
make my blood move toward strong resolve.

My skin is just the first layer on the way to my core
where the will to do worthy deeds finds a beginning ember.
Sometimes I feel the temperature rising inside to out
as my hands grasp ahold of a moment
where I can make a difference.

For right I walk in a fever dream of glory
that will not envelope me forever and ever,
but at least let there be left in the remaining coals
enough warmth for the next man to begin again.

We Will Not Be Moved: The Fight Against Rising Rents, Soaring House Costs and Displacement

by Dawn Phillips

Working-class urban dwellers are in crisis. They face rising evictions, an aging housing stock that is unsafe and in many cases uninhabitable, soaring housing costs and the dramatic displacement of Black and Latino people.

U.S. Census figures show that San Francisco's population has grown from 776,700 in 2000 to 817,500 in 2013. In that same period, the Black population dramatically dipped from 60,500 to just 48,000. As a result, Blacks currently account for less than 6 percent of the city's total population.

For Latinos, the situation is growing more dire as well. A study by the Mission Economic Development Agency and the Council of Community Housing Organizations found that the historically Latino Mission neighborhood went from being 50 percent Latino in 2000 to just 38.5 percent in 2013.

San Francisco may be ground zero for racialized displacement, but the problem is spreading. Skyrocketing housing costs are a key aspect of this phenomenon.

In Oakland, rents increased 12.7 percent last year, the second highest increase in the entire country, and the $2,412 median monthly rent is three times the national average. Further south, along the Bay Area Peninsula, in places like Redwood City and San Mateo, tenants report rent increases as high as 125 percent.

According to the Metropolitan Transportation Commission's 30-year projections, there will be a huge unmet need for affordable housing in the region.

There is a need for 34 percent of all housing produced to be affordable for very low-income residents, 22 percent for low-income and 15 percent for moderate-income people. Actual production, however, will meet only 10 percent of the very low-income need, 9 percent of the low-income need and 11 percent of the moderate-income need.

This crisis of affordability is true nationally as well, where there are only 29 affordable units for every 100 low-income households.

Why is the state of affordable housing and the conditions facing tenants such a critical urban issue?

The Right to the City's *Rise of the Renter Nation* report shows that the top 25 most populated cities in the country are all majority renter cities. Sixty-four percent of San Francisco's and 61 percent of Oakland's population are renters.

Harvard's Joint Center for Housing Studies projects that there will be 4.7 million new renters in the next decade and that half of them will be seniors and the vast majority will be people of color. Dramatic as these figures are, they do not fully reflect the depth of the situation.

The 4.7 million does not include people who would like to rent but are unable to do so, including homeless individuals and families, who number over 600,000 nationally on any given day. They do not include people living in Single Room Occupancy buildings, those who are doubled or tripled up with family and friends and many others in various forms of precarious housing. Neither do they reflect the almost 2 million mostly Black and Latino incarcerated men, who will face tremendous housing insecurity upon their release.

Speculation in single-family housing played a key role in the foreclosure and subprime crisis and it is doing the same with the rental housing market.

Gentrification has created a housing crisis for urban, working-class tenants of color that is compounding historic racial and economic fissures. Cities are racially and economically more inequitable than ever before.

"We have nowhere to go! Don't evict us!" Many families are organizing to resist displacement. Photo credit: Just Cause

Causa Justa :: Just Cause's report *Development Without Displacement: Resisting Gentrification in the Bay Area,* defines gentrification as a profit-driven race and class reconfiguration of urban, working-class, communities of color that have suffered from a history of disinvestment and abandonment.

The process is characterized by the replacement of working class people of color with higher-income residents willing to pay more for the housing.

Gentrification is driven by private developers, landlords and corporations; and facilitated by public sector policies and revenues. Gentrification happens where commercial and residential land is cheap, relative to other areas in the city and region, and where the potential to turn a profit either through repurposing existing structures or building new ones is great.

Enough is enough. We will not be moved. Our neighborhoods and cities are not for sale. Gentrification stops here and we are fighting back. Tenants are creating a new vision for urban development, one not driven by speculation but centered on human need. We are calling for tenant organizing for the right to the city.

Right to the City is a national formation of almost 40 community organizations based in 13 cities around the country. The alliance is dedicated to building a strong housing and urban justice movement nationally and internationally through an urban human rights framework.

The alliance has initiated the national Homes for All campaign to promote a new vision for housing justice based on the 5 principles of affordability, accessibility, long-term stability and protection from displacement, health sustainability and quality as well as community control.

Based on the idea that tenants most impacted by gentrification and housing insecurity have to lead the creation of a new urban housing vision, Right to the City groups are organizing and supporting the leadership of working-class tenants in cities across the country.

"Families for tenant protections now." The youngest are threatened by displacement.

This year we will bring together a broad base of tenants and movement partners to Renter Assemblies nationally, where thousands of working families and individuals will share their stories, inspire each other and develop a plan for making change at the local, state and national levels.

The Assemblies will build up through to 2016 where we hope to lift up the voices, vision and power of working-class renters nationally to spark a national dialogue that will hopefully be a part of the Presidential debates.

Here in the Bay Area, an emerging formation of faith, community and labor organizations are coming together to coalesce a movement to expand protections like just cause laws, rent control and enforcement of healthy housing codes.

Many are responding to the needs of their constituencies: the teachers, public servants and service workers struggling to find quality housing they can afford and increasingly being displaced out of the Bay Area. The existence of strong regional formations like this one will anchor any successful effort to push for tenant rights at the state and national levels.

In California, there is an urgent need to repeal regressive laws like the Ellis Act and Costa-Hawkins, and pave the way for real eviction protection and rent control. Dynamic local and regional organizing is the foundation on which larger scale housing security will be achieved.

Tenant organizing and rights are a key aspect of a powerful anti-gentrification strategy. They are also necessary to an urban agenda centered on racial and economic equity and a healthy society for all people.

This is a call to action. Join us. Why? Because housing is a human right.

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